THE iNFORMER
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DIABETES AND DIGESTIVE AND KIDNEY DISEASES
DDK FELLOWS NEWSLETTER
BY FELLOWS - FOR FELLOWS

The NIDDK iNFORMER Newsletter - June 2011

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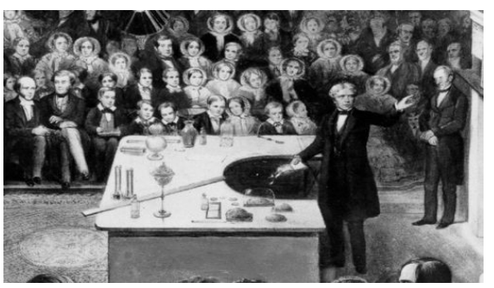

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Events Calendar

Wed June 15th	Job fair- Postdoc conference sponsored by REDI
Mon June 27th	Workplace Dynamics V: Leading Teams
Mon June 27th	BIO Careers Fair in DC

Fellowship Office news

NIDDK Internships

- The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) - Science and Technology Policy
- Extramural Review Branch
- Technology Transfer

Please click on the website below to get more details.

http://fellowshipoffice.niddk.nih.gov/career/InternshipPrograms.shtml

Applicants: email Kala Viswanathan at NIDDK Fellowship Office

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Bio Careers

Register today at BioCareer Center Jobs Board.

Over 1,400 listings for biomedical scientists in a variety of career paths.

www.NIDDK.biocareers.com

NIDDK Office of Fellow Recruitment and Career Development Office has moved to:

B 45, BLDG 12A,
301-451-3640 (VOICE)
301-402-7461 (FAX)

The iNFORMER, is a monthly newsletter published by the Fellows Advisory Board (FAB) in collaboration with the NIDDK Fellowship Office. If you would like to participate in writing newsletter articles or have questions or comments, please contact any of the following members.

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The parallel worlds of science and journalism by Matt Wenham

For four days in mid-February, thousands of scientists gathered at the Washington ConventionCenter for the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The conference featured a range of symposia, panel discussions and keynote plenary sessions which, given AAAS' position as 'the world's largest general science society', covered a huge range of fields. On any given day, it was possible to wander the massive convention center and into sessions on the search for habitable planets, TV weathercasters communicating climate change, the impact of the Gulf oil spill or the approaching federal budget crisis and its effect on science. However, there was one area that was off limits to most attendees – the press zone.

To the outside observer, it was a tale of two meetings. In the rooms tucked away on the mezzanine level of the conference center, behind the security guards at the doors, lay a humming world of journalists and press briefings. While most meeting attendees sat through sessions of up to three hours on a given topic, accredited journalists at the meeting were offered 30 to 45 minute press conferences with the presenters before their sessions, during which they could garner the key messages that would be discussed during the scientific session, question the presenters and record snippets of distilled information for radio broadcasts. In an adjacent room, or occasionally in the corridor outside, reporters could be seen conducting one-on-one interviews with scientists, further gathering the tailored information needed for their particular publication. Yet another room housed row upon row of computer terminals, which were usually occupied by print journalists determinedly hammering away at key boards to write articles intended for newspapers and websites from London and New York to Sydney. This entire operation ran virtually non-stop for the entire conference, with press conferences back to back from 8AM until well into the evening. More than one journalist could be overheard commenting on the human body's surprising ability to get through four days on nothing more than coffee and finger food at the evening receptions.

This dichotomy takes place against the backdrop of the oft-repeated phrase 'scientists are not good communicators'. However, if scientists and the media at meetings like AAAS predominantly interact through the managed dance of press briefings, should this come as a surprise? More importantly, is it even true?

A veteran press attendee at the AAAS Annual Meeting is Robyn Williams, host of *The Science Show* on ABC Radio National, Australia's national broadcaster. Williams has hosted the weekly show since 1975, making him the longest running continuous science show host in the world and a doyen of science journalism. He has attended the AAAS meeting for 30 years, so has witnessed multiple changes in science journalism over that time. Firstly, he forcefully argues against the notion that scientists can't communicate. "Some scientists are brilliant communicators," he said, noting that, like any field, some people will show an ability for explaining their work to others, while others will struggle. "It's a skill that can be learnt, but some scientists will have a talent for it." One of the trends that concerns him is the continual polarization of media sources. "If you choose, you never need read or hear a view that disagrees with your own," he observes, pointing out the difficulties this has caused when trying to have an informed debate on topics such as climate change or vaccination. Social media has also changed the field. Williams remembers when the main avenue for commenting on a news story, on science or otherwise, was through the letters page in a newspaper – a source that was carefully edited and screened. Now, almost anyone can circulate opinions on science via websites, blogs and tweets, meaning that a lot of unfiltered, less-than-accurate information is available for the general public to access. He hopes that more young people "who tend to understand this new media better than my generation" will choose science journalism as a career and help to harness these tools.

Another stalwart of science journalism at the meeting was the former science editor of *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK, Tim Radford. Radford had the task of running most of the press briefings at AAAS, trying to ensure that journalists could get the information they needed from the presenting scientists. He shares Williams' view that the idea of scientists lacking communication skills is a misnomer – a position he expanded on in a recent column in the journal *Nature*. At the meeting, and in his column, Radford lists a slew of scientists who have become almost-household names as science communicators. He believes that the problem for scientists might be in the multiple forums they can be required to communicate in. "The language, form and conventions of the published scientific paper could almost have been devised to conceal information," he says, noting that the words used everyday in science aren't familiar to the general public. However, scientists have "natural gifts" in clarity, observation and knowledge, which should make them well-suited to communicating their work to the public, given the right training and encouragement.

So, if despite the guarded doors and separate sessions, scientists and journalists actually do manage to talk effectively to each other, is there even a problem? If the measurable outcome is the public's understanding of science, then there certainly is, according to another experienced science journalist, Chris Mooney. In a recent talk at NIH, Mooney quoted study findings that showed a frightening lack of scientific understanding, with 40 percent of Americans not believing in evolution and over half unsure of how long it takes the Earth to orbit the sun. Specialised science journalists might be able to work effectively with scientists to express the nuances of scientific findings, but much of the public's information about science will come from non-specialist journalists. In this case, the onus falls on scientists to better communicate their work, particularly in explaining the limitations of the certainty science can provide.

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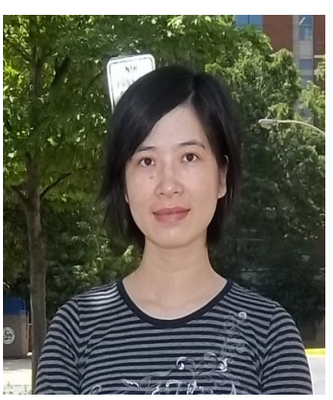
Of course, this is easier said than done, given the media polarization identified by Williams. Mooney remains optimistic though, noting that scientists are best placed to "know what people are missing" and share the benefits of scientific knowledge for important public policy decisions.

In reality, using the media to bridge the gap between scientists and the public will take a multipronged approach. Journalists at meetings like AAAS will still need to have access to condensed, press-only briefings, even if only to give them a quick snapshot of what sessions at the meeting are worth covering in greater detail. The breadth and depth of topics covered at meetings like these are too great to effectively cover in any other way. Scientists, unable to rely solely on sympathetic science journalists to publicise their research, will have to push themselves to make their work understandable to non-specialist reporters and readers. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the public will have to continually be encouraged to understand what scientists do and why it is important. In the words of Albert Einstein, "if you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

Recent Nancy Nossal Awardees








The award was established to honor the memory of Dr. Nancy Nossal who exemplified an enduring commitment to excellence in mentoring. Between 8 and 12 awards are made each each year to eligible clinical and postdoctoral fellows. The highly competitive award is aimed at the top 10% of fellows. Recent awardees pictured clockwise from top left: David Murray, Mawadda Al-naeeli, Ari, Michelle Bond, Yanfuen Liu, and Kyung Hyun Ryu.

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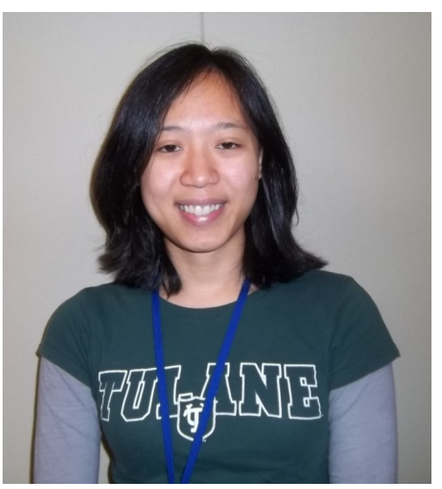
http://dentcartoons.blogspot.com

WELCOME NEW FELLOWS!



The following fellows joined NIDDK during the last month:

David Libich

Visiting Fellow- Canada

PhD, University of Guelph

Laboratory of Chemical Physics (Clore group) Bldg 50

Christine Krieger

IRTA

PhD, University of Pennsylvania

Diabetes Branch (Gershengorn group) Bldg 50

Wu Xuefeng

Visiting Fellow- China

PhD, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences

Diabetes Branch (Forrest group) Bldg 10